The Postwar Boom

CHAPTER OBJECTIVE

INTERACT WITH HISTORY

TIME LINE

SECTION 1 Postwar America

SECTION 2 The American Dream in the Fifties

SECTION 3 Popular Culture

SECTION 4 The Other America

VISUAL SUMMARY
The Postwar Boom

CHAPTER OBJECTIVE

*To understand the economic, social, and cultural changes that occurred in postwar America*
You have returned home from serving in World War II to find that your country is changing. The cities have swelled. Outlying suburbs are being built up with almost identical homes. America produces more and cheaper goods. In a booming economy, couples marry and start families in record numbers. As you watch clever ads on TV for the newest labor-saving gadgets, you feel nostalgia for a simpler time.

What is the American dream of the 1950s?

Examine the Issues

• How does pressure to conform affect the American dream?
• Who might be excluded from the new prosperity?
• How does advertising promote certain lifestyles and ideals?
The Postwar Boom

**The United States**

- **1946** Baby boom begins.
- **1947** Jackie Robinson integrates major league baseball.
- **1948** Harry S. Truman is elected president.
- **1950's** Disc jockey Alan Freed is the first to use the term “rock ‘n’ roll” on the air.
- **1952** Dwight D. Eisenhower is elected president.
- **1953** Korean War ceasefire is signed.
- **1954** *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* outlaws school segregation.

**The World**

- **1949** Mao Zedong's Communist forces gain control of China.
- **1950** Korean War begins.
- **1954** U.S.S.R. opens the first small nuclear power plant.

*continued...*
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The United States

1956 Eisenhower is reelected.

1958 NASA—the National Aeronautics and Space Administration—is established.

1959 Alaska and Hawaii become the 49th and 50th states.

1960 John F. Kennedy is elected president.

The World

1956 Soviets crush uprising in Hungary.

1957 Soviets launch Sputnik 1.

1959 Fidel Castro comes to power in Cuba.
Postwar America

KEY IDEA

As Americans try to put the nightmare of World War II behind them and begin rebuilding their lives, the economy booms and the country becomes conservative.
Postwar America

OVERVIEW

The Truman and Eisenhower administrations led the nation to make social, economic, and political adjustments following World War II.

MAIN IDEA

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

In the years after World War II, the United States became the economic and military power that it still is today.

TERMS & NAMES

- GI Bill of Rights
- Fair Deal
- suburb
- Dixiecrat
- Harry S. Truman
1. List the key events relating to postwar America. Use the dates below as a guide.

Postwar unemployment peaks; strikes breakout; Republican Party controls the House and Senate; Truman appoints Committee on Civil Rights.

Congress passes anti-union Taft-Hartley Act.

Truman integrates the armed forces; Dixiecrates form States’ Rights Democratic Party; Truman wins presidency. Jackie Robinson voted National League’s Most Valuable Player.

Eisenhower wins presidency.

1946 1947 1948 1949 1952

continued . . .
Postwar America

2. Do you think Eisenhower’s actions reflected his philosophy of dynamic conservatism? Why or why not?

Think About:

- the definition of dynamic conservatism
- Eisenhower’s actions on civil rights policies
- Eisenhower’s accomplishments on other domestic issues

Yes—He raised the minimum wage, extended social security and unemployment benefits, and increased funding for public housing.

No—He did little to support civil rights.
Postwar America

3. Why do you think most Americans went along with Eisenhower's conservative approach to domestic policy?

The Cold War caused many Americans to seek security in traditional conservative values, and Eisenhower’s approach has brought progress and prosperity.

continued . . .
1. Postwar America

4. How did presidents Truman and Eisenhower differ regarding civil rights?

Truman took action. He integrated the military, appointed a committee on civil rights, and had the 1948 Democratic Party’s platform emphasize civil rights.

Eisenhower did not believe that the federal government had a role to play in desegregation, but he did uphold existing laws.
The American Dream in the Fifties

KEY IDEA

Many Americans find their dream of material comfort and economic prosperity realized. But some find the cost too high.
The American Dream in the Fifties

OVERVIEW

During the 1950s, the economy boomed, and many Americans enjoyed material comfort.

Why It Matters Now

The “American dream,” a notion that was largely shaped by the fifties, is still pursued today.

Terms & Names

- conglomerate
- consumerism
- franchise
- baby boom
- planned obsolescence
- Dr. Jonas Salk
1. List examples of specific goals that characterized the American dream for suburbanites in the 1950s.

The American Dream

Values

Conformity; material goods implied success

Home/Family

Two or three children, close family ties; single-family home in suburbia; one or two cars; television

Work

Man is the breadwinner, who works at a white-collar job; woman takes care of home and children

continued . . .
2. In what ways do you think current environmental consciousness is related to the “throwaway society” of the 1950s? **Think About:**

- the purchasing habits of 1950s consumers
- the effects of planned obsolescence
- today’s emphasis on recycling

Today’s common practice of recycling discarded items and trash, reusing empty food and other containers, and buying products with long-term warranties might be seen as necessary steps to reverse the “throwaway” trend of the 1950s.

*continued*
The American Dream in the Fifties

3. Do you think that the life of a typical suburban homemaker during the 1950s was fulfilling or not?

ANSWER

Yes—had a home in the suburbs, a car, children, material comforts, and did not have to work outside the home

No—tied to her home and family and had no time or encouragement to develop her own interests
Mass popular culture booms, largely because of television. While the media generally reflect mainstream middle-class values, a vital counterculture flourishes.
Mainstream Americans, as well as the nation’s subcultures, embraced new forms of entertainment during the 1950s.

Television and rock ‘n’ roll, integral parts of the nation’s culture today, emerged during the postwar era.

**TERMS & NAMES**

- beat movement
- rock ‘n’ roll
- jazz
- mass media
- Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
1. List some popular culture idols of the 1950’s, and identify the art form and major achievements associated with each person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Art Form</th>
<th>Achievements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lucille Ball</td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Star of <em>I Love Lucy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward R. Murrow</td>
<td>Television</td>
<td>Host of <em>Person to Person</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elvis Presley</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Rock ‘n’ roll singer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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2. Do you agree with Newton Minow’s statement that TV was “a vast wasteland”?

**ANSWER**

Agree—TV presented idealized white values and ignored the problems of minorities.

Disagree—TV programs provided needed escape for many people and also portrayed the ideal family life that many valued.

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3. How did radio, TV, and the movies contribute to the success of rock ‘n’ roll?

They carried images of singers and the sounds of their music to most Americans.

*continued . . .*
Popular Culture

4. In what ways were the rock ‘n’ roll musicians and the beat poets of the 1950s similar? **Think About:**

   - the values the musicians and poets believed in
   - people’s reactions to the musicians, poets, and writers

   Both were rebellious, experimental, and innovative; often wore nonconformist clothing; attracted the young, as well as older, middle-class Americans; and performed for live audiences.
The Other America

KEY IDEA

Many Americans suffer from poverty and racial discrimination, despite unprecedented economic prosperity in the nation.
The Other America

OVERVIEW

MAIN IDEA

Amidst the prosperity of the 1950s, millions of Americans lived in poverty.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

America today continues to experience a marked income gap between affluent and nonaffluent people.

TERMS & NAMES

• urban renewal
• bracero
• termination policy
1. Identify the common problems that African Americans, Mexican Americans, and Native Americans faced during the 1950s.

- Poverty
- Inadequate housing
- Discrimination and social injustice
- Harsh or ineffective government policies
- Few advocates among mainstream public
- Exclusion from the American Dream
- Second-class citizenship
- Limited job opportunities
- Limited social mobility

continued . . .
2. Do you think that urban renewal was an effective approach to the housing problem in inner cities?

**Think About:**

- the goals of the National Housing Act of 1949
- the claims made by some critics of urban renewal
- the residents’ best interest

**Effective**—The ultimate goal was to construct affordable housing for the poor, and it did tear down many bad areas and put up new housing.

**Ineffective**—It did not provide enough new housing and displaced many poor people when old housing was torn down.

*continued . . .*
3. How did Native Americans work to increase their participation in the U.S. political process?

Native Americans formed organizations to register voters and protest discrimination.

continued . . .
4. Which major population shift—“white flight,” migration from Mexico, or relocation of Native Americans—do you think had the greatest impact on U.S. society? Why? **Think About:**

- the impact of “white flight”
- the influx of “braceros”
- the effects of the termination policy

**Answer:**

White flight—It caused polarization of rich and poor and suburban and urban cultures.

Migration of Mexicans—They met with opposition because they provided job competition.

Native American relocation—It displaced an entire group of people.